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SUBJECT: PROTESTERS TOPPLE TRUMAN STATUE IN DOWNTOWN ATHENS

Classified By: Ambassador Charles Ries, reasons 1.4 (B) AND (D)

¶1. (U) Summary: Members of PAME, a trade unionist movement affiliated with Greece's Communist Party (KKE), toppled the Harry S. Truman statue in downtown Athens on Tuesday night, July 25. The act was committed on the margins of a rally to express solidarity with the Palestinian people, where protesters marched past the U.S. Embassy and continued onward to the Israeli Embassy. U.S. Embassy and GoG spokesman have publicly condemned the vandalism. Police, who were taken by surprise at the time of the act, are now guarding the downed statue and investigations to identify culprits are ongoing. The city of Athens has agreed to re-erect the statue at its expense as soon as possible. The Truman statue has been repeatedly targeted by leftist protesters since its unveiling in 1963. End Summary.

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Statue Topples  
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¶2. (U) The communist-party-affiliated PAME trade unionist movement participated in a rally and march Tuesday evening, July 25. The event, which commenced in downtown Athens and continued onward to the U.S. Embassy and then up to the Israeli Embassy, was organized to demonstrate solidarity with the Palestinian people and opposition to Israeli military responses to Hezbollah. Approximately 20-30 members of PAME broke off from the rally at around 7:00pm and proceeded from several directions to the Truman statue. Unhindered by outnumbered police, they attempted to sever the statue's legs. Persevering, they then tied ropes to the statue and used an electric winch to pull it down to the ground, dispersing immediately afterwards. Media footage of the action was aired on local TV Tuesday evening.

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Police Response  
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¶3. (C) Chief of the Greek National Police, Anastassios Demoschakis, told us the police were "surprised and embarrassed" by PAME's well-organized and efficient premeditated attack on the statue. Demoschakis said the vandals arrived on the scene sufficiently equipped to carry out what was described as a "well-rehearsed" task, and the police simply did not have adequate manpower to halt PAME's destruction. Police are currently guarding the statue, which is still on the ground. Fingerprints have been taken and data is being collected to help identify the culprits. Both Demoschakis and Mayor of Athens Theodoros Bechrakis have assured us that the city plans to re-erect the statue at the city's expense as soon as possible (pending an assessment of damage) and the statue will henceforth be guarded against future attacks.

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Public Statements  
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¶4. (U) A PAME spokesman explained that "this symbolic act underlines our stance against imperialism." However, GoG spokesman Theodoros Roussopoulos responded to the vandalism by saying, "In modern Greek Democracy with its absolute respect for human rights and guaranteed freedom of expression, there is no place for such actions and they are condemnable." Ambassador Ries also commented on the statue's demise Tuesday night, stating "I was dismayed to learn about the toppling of the statue of President Truman, who did so much for Greece and believed in Greece's future."

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Statue's History  
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¶5. (U) The Truman statue was unveiled in Athens on May 29, 1963. During the unveiling ceremony, then PM Karamanlis delivered remarks, stating "If the Greeks want to survive as a free nation, they should not forget the dramatic period with which Mr. Truman's name is linked. Should they forget it, they would deserve their fate and have no right to ask for anyone's help." The statue was first vandalized with graffiti in 1967, and bombed by the "Movement of October 20" in 1970. It was first knocked off its pedestal in a bomb blast on March 22, 1986, and the Pasok government quietly refused to re-erect it. A January 1, 1987 NY Times article stated, "The leftist-dominated Athens City Council had voted against the restoration of the statue, which was damaged before an official visit by Secretary of State George P. Shultz. Conservative council members accused the leftists of essentially condoning the bomb attack." After complaints from the conservative opposition and from Greek-Americans, who had provided the money to put up the statue in the early 1960's, Pasok relented and agreed to the statue's repairs. Once this decision was made, Pasok resolved the issue quickly. The catalyst was likely an announcement by various

Greek-American organizations of plans to travel to Athens in March 1987 to re-erect the statue in a formal ceremony.

¶6. (U) In the 1980s and 1990s, the statue was repeatedly targeted by leftist protesters. It was attacked and defaced with paint bombs several times and was toppled again by demonstrators in May 1999. The Pasok government of PM Simitis placed it back on its pedestal on November 10, 1999, just before the Clinton presidential visit to Athens. On March 30, 2003, members of the Greek Social Forum wrapped the statue with paper and spray painted at the base: "Return To Sender." In May 2003, then Mayor Bakoyannis (current Greek FM) declared the statue a protected cultural monument following entreaties from Greek-American organizations. In the end, the city of Athens has spent approximately \$10,000 USD on the cost of vandal repairs over the course of the statue's history.  
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